

VZCZCXRO9950  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHAE #0480/01 2760845  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 020845Z OCT 08 VOL ZDK DUE NUMEROUS SVCS  
FM AMEMBASSY ASMARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9923  
RUEHPNH/NVC PORTSMOUTH NH 0321  
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAD/AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI 0154  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 0011  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0069  
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 0229  
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 0456  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0214  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0199  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA 1439  
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 1308  
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 1763  
RUEHYN/AMEMBASSY SANAA 1852  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0022  
RUEHGA/AMCONSUL CALGARY 0028  
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 0048  
RUEHDE/AMCONSUL DUBAI 0113  
RUEHFT/AMCONSUL FRANKFURT 1345  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 0003  
RUEHMIL/AMCONSUL MILAN 0040  
RUEHNP/AMCONSUL NAPLES 0021  
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO 0020

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SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/CA, AF/E, CA/FPP, CA/EX  
PASS TO INL/HSTC  
PASS TO KCC WILLIAMSBURG KY  
POSTS FOR FRAUD PREVENTION MANAGERS  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS  
FRANKFURT FOR RCO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CVIS](#) [KFRD](#) [CPAS](#) [CMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [ER](#)  
SUBJECT: FRAUD SUMMARY - ASMARA

REFS: A. Asmara 000346, B. Asmara 000204, C. 07 STATE 171211

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11. (U) The following is a summary of fraud conditions in Asmara from April to September 2008. Point of contact is Conoff Brian Shelbourn, shelbournbl@state.gov, 291-1-12-00-04.

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12. (SBU) COUNTRY CONDITIONS  
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The Government of the State of Eritrea's (GSE) economic policies led to increasing scarcity of basic goods and impoverishment of the people. Employment prospects for the unemployed are virtually non-existent. Of those employed, many work as draftees in the Eritrean national service which provides wa'e# barely a ste !bove slave labor; \$30 to \$40 per month. Basic commodities such as pasta and flour are strictly rationed and are sometimes unavailable due to restrictions on imports and the government's monopoly on possessing hard currency. Propane, the basic cooking fuel, was unavailable for several weeks, leading to the use of kerosene (which was also unavailable for several weeks) and charcoal for heating food. President Isaias Afwerki recently stated that white bread and pasta are "luxuries." In 2007 Eritrea's inflation rate was 25.6% and per capita GDP was only \$220. The GSE continues to press large numbers of citizens into long, undefined periods of military service. Disenchantment continues to build, especially among the young. This has led to a massive illegal exodus across the borders of Sudan and Ethiopia, with as many as 2,000 leaving Eritrea illegally each

month.

Mandatory national service begins at the age of 17 for both boys and girls, and includes intensive military training. While the officially published maximum age is 40, in practice the term of national service currently extends up to 54 for men and 47 for women. National service was originally intended to be only 18 months, but currently has no end date; many individuals have been forced to work in national service for over a decade. The GSE generally does not provide passports or exit visas to Eritreans who are not released from national service. For these reasons, many parents seek any avenue to get their children out of the country prior to being conscripted, even at the risk of their own arrests. Those unable to obtain permission to leave Eritrea often illegally flee across the border to either Sudan or Ethiopia to escape the harsh conditions. Many people with passports leave legally and do not return. The desperation to leave Eritrea is felt at all levels of society.

The consular section in Asmara has been closed to most visa services since January 2007, but (a# continued li-i\$ed issuances for extreme humanitarian cases, adoptions, and for travel clearly in USG interests. The section provides document intake services for Immigrant and Diversity visas, transfers cases to other posts upon request, and provides document verification services to other U.S. Embassies processing Eritrean applicants. Post anticipates remaining closed for visa services for the immediate future, but continues to provide the full array of American Citizen Services.

Eritrea has historically been considered a low to medium fraud country, with strong cultural inhibitions against fraudulent activities. Due to deteriorating country conditions, however, Asmara is considered a medium fraud post, with potential to become

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high as profit-motivated fraud rings learn to take advantage of a population desperate to escape the GSE's oppressive policies.

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13. (SBU) NIV FRAUD  
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Post is not currently issuing NIVs in significant numbers. The sole instance of fraud was misrepresentation during an interview by an LES sent to the U.S. by the Embassy for training. Asmara is considered to be a medium fraud post for NIVs.

Student visas - The University of Asmara provides reliable student record verification. Posts interviewing Eritrean students should be aware that the University graduated its final class in 2007 and is no longer operating. Eritrea currently has no accredited tertiary schools.

Post received information during the reporting period that dozens of Eritreans purchased Turkish visas through the Turkish Embassy in Sana'a. Although most of these visa recipients were reportedly using Turkey as a transit point for European Union (EU) countries, consular officers adjudicating NIVs for Eritreans should not consider visas to Turkey issued at the Turkish Embassy in Sana'a since May 2008 as an indication of legitimate international travel.

Post also received reliable reports of at least 5 Eritreans who use false French or Belgian passports purchased in Dubai for travel from Asmara to the EU, where they claimed asylum upon arrival.

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14. (SBU) IV FRAUD  
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Post is not currently issuing IVs in significant numbers and has not experienced fraud during the reporting period. Asmara is considered to be a medium fraud post for IVs.

Marriage fraud has always been a concern of the consular section due to the number of arranged marriages. The fraud seen in Eritrea is typical of many other countries, except that it is neither highly

organized nor sophisticated. It tends to be fairly easy to detect, in that the Amcit in the relationship typically leaves Eritrea immediately after the wedding to file the petition and then maintains little or no contact until documentation is requested. Also, all weddings in Eritrea are grand affairs, with even impoverished families having elaborate ceremonies recorded on video. Any wedding not celebrated with an elaborate religious service or not having video documentation is highly suspect.

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15. (SBU) DV FRAUD  
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Post is not currently issuing DVs in significant numbers and has not experienced fraud during the reporting period.

Forty percent of high school matriculation exam results for DV applicants sent to Asmara from other posts were fraudulent during the reporting period (see para 12). Asmara is considered to be a medium fraud post for DVs.

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16. (SBU) ACS AND PASSPORT FRAUD  
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Post has experienced no cases of passport fraud during the reporting period. Asmara is considered to be a low fraud post for ACS and passports.

Post notes a doubling of CRBA and passport applications during the reporting period compared to the same period in 2007. Conoff's inquiries indicate the awareness level within the Eritrean diaspora regarding consular services has increased. Also, non-resident fathers wish to have their Amcit children's U.S. passport in-hand should the economic or military situation in Eritrea deteriorate.

Conoff remains vigilant in identifying passport/CRBA fraud indicators, and expects to see a future increase in fraudulent activity. Eritrea's resident Amcit community is small and mostly static. The majority of passport renewals are for individuals known by consular staff. For CRBA applicants of recently born babies, the mother's hospital stay certificate is routinely requested and verified with the hospital as needed. DNA is routinely requested for children born out of wedlock to non-resident fathers and first time applications for older children.

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17. (SBU) ADOPTION FRAUD  
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Post is currently accepting petitions for adoption cases of Eritrean children. There have been few adoption cases during the reporting period. Asmara is considered to be a medium fraud post for adoptions.

Post received one inquiry during the reporting period requesting a B1/B2 visa for a young Eritrean child to visit his brother in the U.S. Conoff found that the child's brother was adopted by an American family, and that the child for whom travel was requested was legally adopted by the same family in Eritrea. Conoff's investigation concluded the family was trying to circumvent the USG adoption process. It also cannot be ruled out that the children's birth mother received payment to give up her children. The family informed Conoff they will file an adoption petition for the child in the U.S.

Like other types of fraud, adoption fraud is neither organized nor sophisticated but it is becoming more prevalent. The most common form of fraud is the classification of a child as an orphan while the birth parents are still alive. The usual reasons for this type of fraud are to improve the economic condition of the child or to avoid national service. Eritrean adoptions almost always take place within the family, and the courts readily grant them. The Eritrean adoption is then used as the basis for a U.S. adoption case.

Although the High Court or the Ministry of Labor and Human Welfare reviews all adoption cases, the corrupt legal system in Eritrea provides fraud opportunities for those with high-level GSE connections.

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18. (SBU) DNA TESTING  
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Post uses DNA testing primarily for out-of-wedlock births and for

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first-time citizenship applications for older children; there were no negative DNA results during the reporting period. There are also many instances of aunts/uncles petitioning a niece/nephew as an IR2 to provide better economic opportunity or to avoid the harsh conditions of mandatory military service. Post will continue to liberally recommend DNA testing for IR2 applications if/when the visa section reopens, and advises posts processing Eritrean IFs to consider doing the same.

Post notes Eritrean family and social structures are conducive to obtaining reliable DNA results. Family relationships tend to be well-defined and along American norms, and there is no influx of refugees or migrants. Eritrea has some isolated ethnic groups, such as the Saho and Nara, with which the consular section has little or no interaction.

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19. (SBU) ASYLUM FRAUD  
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Post is not currently issuing Visas 92#9# in significant numbers and has not experienced fraud during the reporting period. Asmara is considered a low fraud post for visas 92/93.

Family members of some GSE officials are known to have applied for asylum in the U.S. The GSE official is then listed as a family member for reunion. Although Conoff understands that doubts regarding the asylum case are not pertinent to adjudicating Visas 92 cases, post provides DHS with derogatory information regarding the asylee's family relationships in Eritrea if necessary.

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10. (SBU) ALIEN SMUGGLING  
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Eritrea is a source country for illegal travelers, but there are no indications of an organized system designed to facilitate travel to the U.S. Most smuggling is geared toward getting people out of Eritrea; subsequent attempts to travel to the U.S. originate in third countries. Eritrean men under 54 and unmarried women under 47 (with some exceptions) generally cannot obtain passports or exit visas, but the specific rules are opaque and change frequently without notice. Post estimates 2,000 Eritreans illegally cross the Sudanese and Ethiopian borders each month, with smugglers charging between \$1,000 and \$7,000 for the service. The smugglers are reportedly Eritrean military, police, or national security officers, but there are also reports of Rashaida (a trans-national ethnic group known to be traders) involvement.

Approximately 5,000 So

ma refugees reside in a camp near Massawa.

A UNHCR representative noted that an undefined number of Somalis in the camp have "moved on" to other countries. A smaller camp of less than 100 Sudanese refugees is scheduled to be closed by UNHCR in the near future.

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11. (SBU) DS CRIMINAL FRAUD INVESTIGATIONS  
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Conoff and RSO have had reduced opportunities to collaborate on fraud investigations due to the closure of the visa section, but ACS case hits are immediately shared and discussed. RSO responds to

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consular requests expeditiously.

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12. (SBU) HOST COUNTRY PASSPORTS,  
IDENTITY DOCUMENTS, AND CIVIL REGISTRY  
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The Eritrean passport has no identifiable security features. Bio data is hand-written, physical photographs are used, and the lamination is of extremely poor quality. In addition, an Eritrean passport is Somali, Sudanese, Bedouins from the Arabian peninsula, and other non-Eritreans traveling on Eritrean tourist and diplomatic passports. There are reports that the GSE may issue machine readable passports in 2009, but these reports have not been corroborated. If the GSE issues machine readable passports, it is likely the old passport will continue to be valid, given the lack of GSE capacity to replace them. GSE consular officials have rebuffed requests from Conoff to discuss the matter.

The Eritrean national ID card is the only document proving Eritrean nationality, but it too is hand-written (only in Tigrinya and Arabic, not English), poorly laminated, and easily altered.

A passport recently issued by the Eritrean embassy in Khartoum may be a sign that the applicant has left Eritrea in violation of Eritrean immigration law, and therefore may have questionable ties to Eritrea. The GSE issues passports to Eritrean nationals living abroad, even if they departed illegally. Eritrean passports issued in Khartoum cost \$50, and the applicant usually signs a document admitting to having left Eritrea illegally. Reports indicate the Eritrean embassy in Khartoum maintains a list of persons the GSE deems hostile to the regime, and that Sudanese authorities have arrested and deported these individuals at the request of the Embassy. Post speculates the government facilitates passport issuance abroad in hopes that these emigrants will remit hard currency after settlement in wealthier countries.

Post received evidence that the GSE provides a certificate to Eritrean asylees living overseas to allow them entry/exit without an Eritrean entrance stamp being placed in their passport. The certificate is written only in Tigrinya, is stamped for entrance and exit, and provides proof of the individual's payment of the 2% diaspora income tax. The GSE's desperate lack of hard currency is the governments asylees back to Eritrea.

Adjudicating officers using completion of Eritrean National Service as a sign of ties to Eritrea should be aware of reliable reports that a source in Dubai supplies false national service completion certificates. Conoff has yet to examine a false certificate, but official certificates have no known security features and are easily forged. The GSE does not provide verification of these certificates.

Officially issued birth and marriage certificates are available for sale for \$330 from the Asmara (and presumably other) Eritrean municipalities. The GSE recently pushed responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of applicant information down to the neighborhood level official in an effort to improve accuracy and accountability. Instead, the move created profit-making opportunities. Information

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contained on official birth and marriage certificates can be completely altered as the payer desires.

On a previous note, the computerized birth, marriage, and divorce records, and is assigning a unique identification number to each person. This system will eventually roll out to all towns and villages in Eritrea, and indicates the GSE's willingness to curb the falsification of legal documents.

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13. (SBU) COOPERATION WITH HOST GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES  
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Post continues to receive no cooperation on consular issues from the host government, other than routine document verification, but because many legitimately issued governmental documents are suspect, this cooperation is of limited use. School records are well kept and historically local schools have cooperated in verifying these documents. Post believes that if we were to identify organized fraud rings that the local authorities would take an interest, but to date, post has seen no evidence indicating the existence of this type of organized activity.

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14. (SBU) AREAS OF PARTICULAR CONCERN  
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The increasing desperation of Eritreans to leave the country so far has not led to a significant increase in fraud indicators, contrary to what we would expect. Post remains vigilant in looking for fraud indicators, especially in new passport and CRBA applications, and assumes that an increase in fraudulent applications is highly likely given the current political and economic situation in Eritrea.

Post believes we would experience a large number of NIV applicants if the consular section reopened for visa services. The usual walk-in application process would not be able to accommodate the volume. In this case, Post would employ the online NIV appointment system, an active public diplomacy program, and increased local guard force presence to avoid the common fraud opportunities associated with queuing.

The GSE's restrictive policies continued to hamper consular operations. Although the Harris technicians were issued visas after three years of absence from Asmara, some applications for other TDY visas were denied or ignored. GSE restrictions on diplomatic travel make it unlikely that an American citizen could rely on emergency consular assistance outside of the capital. Consular notification and access to incarcerated American citizens was not provided for three known arrest cases during the reporting period.

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15. (SBU) STAFFING AND TRAINING  
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Brian Shelbourn - Consular Officer  
Anti-fraud conference, Accra, April 2007

Tsehainesh Yacob - Consular Assistant  
Senior FSN Fraud Prevention Training - September 2002

Tsegereda Tekle - Visa Assistant

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No formal fraud prevention training

The section remains at a low staffing level and will remain so until the section fully opens for visa services. Training options are currently limited to those available inside Eritrea. The Mission's restrictions on off-shore training, currently in place due to the number of LES not returning from training in the U.S., limits our staff to online courses and on-the-job learning opportunities.  
MCMULLEN